

A vision for a Wales where nobody dies of bowel cancer



Bowel Cancer UK

Beating bowel cancer together
Curo cancer y coluddion gyda'n gilydd

We are the UK's leading bowel cancer charity. We are determined to save lives and improve the quality of life of everyone affected by bowel cancer.

Our vision is a future in Wales where nobody dies of the disease. We support and fund targeted research, provide expert information and support to patients and their families, educate the public and professionals about the disease and campaign for early diagnosis and access to best treatment and care.

Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in Wales, but the second biggest cancer killer.



9 in 10 people survive bowel cancer if diagnosed at the earliest stage.

Every year nearly 2,400 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer in Wales, and sadly nearly 1,000 people die from the disease.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Bowel cancer is treatable and curable, especially if diagnosed early. However, fewer than four in 10 people (37.1%) with bowel cancer are diagnosed at the early stages 1 and 2, and over half of people (51%) are diagnosed at stages 3 and 4. This must change if we are to achieve our vision of a future where nobody in Wales dies of bowel cancer.

The work of Bowel Cancer UK in Wales

We carry out a range of activities in Wales to raise awareness of our support and information services for people affected by bowel cancer. This includes reaching communities of need, such as areas of high socio-economic deprivation and ethnically diverse communities. We have a dedicated team of awareness volunteers in Wales, who have all been affected by bowel cancer. They deliver online and in-person bowel cancer awareness talks to community groups and workplaces, and host awareness stands at events, helping people to understand the signs, symptoms, and risk factors for the disease, as well as the importance of screening.

In 2025, across Wales we were able to host bowel cancer awareness stands and deliver talks that have reached over 2,100 people.

In addition, we are reaching people who are often underserved and disproportionately affected by health inequalities in Wales, including people living in areas of deprivation, diverse ethnic communities, refugees and asylum seekers, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, people in contact with probation services, and more than 1,200 people through direct community engagement in Swansea.

Our work with the Welsh Parliament

We engage with and provide briefings to Members of the Senedd and are also a member of the Wales Cancer Alliance (WCA). This is a coalition of charities working to prevent cancer, improve care, fund research and influence policy in Wales.

We support the key recommendations published in the recent manifesto *Fixing the Foundations* by the WCA. This includes a new, long-term, cancer strategy for Wales, consistent leadership of cancer services in Wales with clear accountability, involving patients and the third sector in developing cancer services, and routine collection of data on cancer services and patient experience to underpin a culture of improvement.



Bowel Cancer UK's awareness roadshow in Swansea

Our key recommendations for the next Welsh Government

1 The next Welsh Government must prioritise optimising the bowel cancer screening programme and increasing informed uptake, particularly in the most deprived communities.

Bowel cancer screening saves lives. In Wales, everyone aged 50–74 is invited to take part in screening every two years using a simple home test that looks for hidden blood in a stool sample. The UK National Screening Committee recommends that screening is delivered at the most sensitive test threshold that diagnostic services can safely support. The more sensitive the test, the more cancers will be prevented and found earlier, saving more lives. We want to see the Welsh Government commit to further optimisation of bowel cancer screening, supporting research and the rapid adoption of innovative, evidence-based approaches to maximise diagnostic pathways.

At the same time, only around 65% of people in Wales who are invited to take part, complete the home ‘poo test’. This means thousands of people are missing the chance to detect bowel cancer early when it is easier to treat. We are working to encourage people to take part in the Bowel Cancer Screening programme, especially in underserved communities, where participation is lower.

The next Welsh Government must commit to a clear plan to optimise bowel cancer screening, including lowering the test threshold safely over time, expanding diagnostic capacity, increasing informed uptake particularly in deprived communities, and supporting innovation. By taking coordinated action across these areas, we can improve early diagnosis and prevent more people in Wales from finding out they have bowel cancer too late.

FIT sensitivity table:

Nation	Age of eligibility (50-74)	FIT threshold (20µg/g)*
England	50-74	120µg/g ->80µg/g**
Scotland	50-74	80µg/g
Wales	50-74	80µg/g
Northern Ireland	60-74	120µg/g

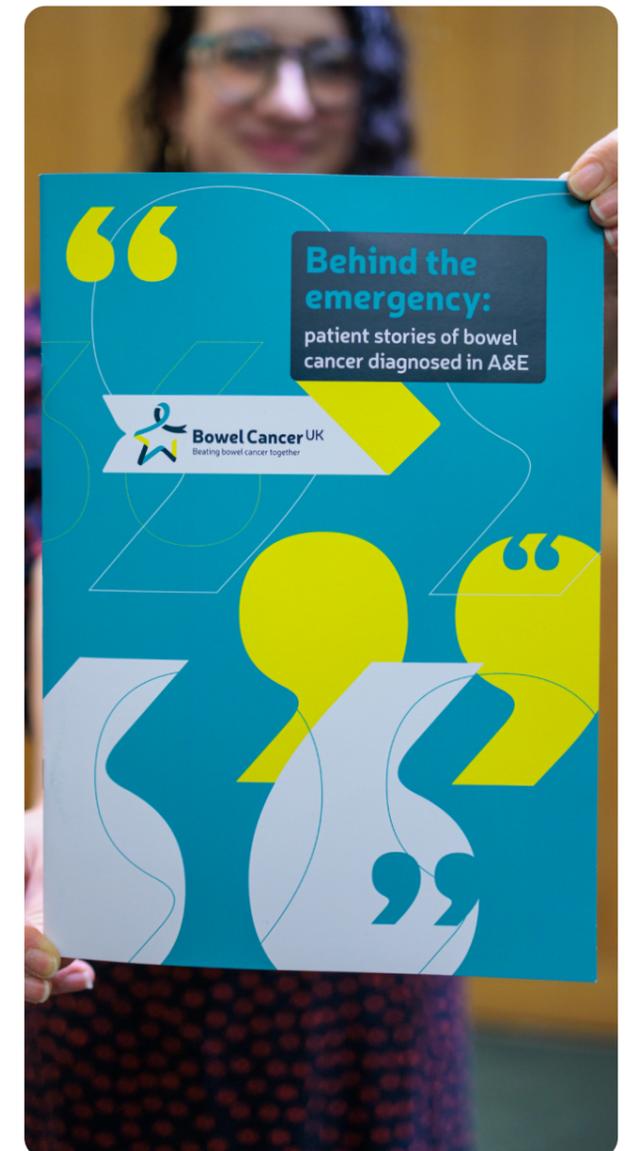
* UK National Screening Committee has identified 20µg as the optimal threshold for FIT in bowel cancer screening

**National coverage of the lower threshold in England is set to be completed by 2028

2 The next Welsh Government must tackle bowel cancer deaths by addressing emergency diagnosis.

There is a lack of specific data for Wales, but we know that around 1 in 4 bowel cancers are diagnosed in an emergency more widely across the UK, for example when sudden complications mean somebody ends up in A&E. For these patients, the disease is typically more advanced and harder to treat and outcomes, sadly, tend to be worse. A&E is not the place to be told you have bowel cancer, and we want to see a future where this does not happen. A future where symptoms are recognised earlier, referrals happen quickly.

Addressing emergency diagnosis will help reduce unnecessary deaths from bowel cancer. However, there is still limited understanding of why and how diagnosis happens so often in an emergency. Our recent report *Behind the Emergency* highlights the experiences of people diagnosed with bowel cancer in an emergency setting. We are asking the next Welsh Government to work with us to build a better understanding of the factors that can lead to an emergency diagnosis, and what can be done to prevent people reaching crisis point.



3 Support optimal Lynch syndrome testing and management pathways.

Too many people with Lynch syndrome still do not know they have it. This inherited condition can increase someone's risk of developing bowel cancer by up to 80%, yet only around 5% of people in the UK with Lynch syndrome have been identified. Finding and managing hereditary bowel cancer is essential for early detection, surveillance, and prevention. Wales has taken positive steps, including routine tumour testing for everyone newly diagnosed with bowel cancer to help make sure people are tested and supported consistently.

Now we need the next Welsh Government to go further by establishing a national Lynch syndrome registry for Wales, so families are identified earlier, followed up, and supported to prevent bowel cancer or detect it at the earliest possible stage.

4 Support the findings of Audit Wales report on a more strategic approach to the health workforce to appropriately diagnose bowel cancer at an earlier stage.

In January 2025, Audit Wales published a report showing that bowel cancer services in Wales were failing to meet key waiting time targets, with fewer than half of patients starting treatment within the 62-day goal, and a quarter waiting over 106 days to begin treatment for their cancer.

Whilst the report highlighted a significant milestone had been reached through the expansion of screening to thousands of more people across Wales, it also revealed that only 21% of patients were offered a timely colonoscopy if required, well below the target of 90%.

Plans to improve cancer and endoscopy services in Wales need clarity, strong leadership, and oversight. The next Welsh Government and NHS Executive must take a clear role in driving improvements. Long-standing gaps in the cancer workforce, including clinical oncologists and pathologists, are affecting waiting times, patient experience, and early diagnosis.

Long-term, funded policies improve cancer outcomes and survival. We support Audit Wales' call for a strategic approach to population health and disease prevention, which could save lives and reduce NHS pressure by tackling factors that increase the risk of cancer, including bowel cancer.

Things you can do to help

With the help of our campaigners, we have built a network of bowel cancer champions in parliaments at Westminster, the Senedd, Stormont, and Holyrood.

A bowel cancer champion is a politician who pledges to support our campaigning work nationally or locally. Building this network of politicians helps us to influence health policy developed in government. If you are interested in becoming a champion, or learning more about our work in Wales, please contact us at campaigns@bowelcanceruk.org.uk



Tonia Antoniazzi MP for Gower



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